Nietzsche's lecture at the Basel Museum
Delivered on February 1, 1870.

Greek tragedy perished differently than all its older, sister art forms: it ended tragically, while they all faded away with a beautiful death. If, in accordance with an ideal state of nature, one breathes one's last with beautiful offspring and without distress, then the end of those older art forms reveals such an ideal world to us; they die and disappear, while their more beautiful offspring are already raising their heads vigorously. With the death of Greek musical drama, however, an immense emptiness arose, felt everywhere with profound intensity; it was said that poetry itself had been lost, and the stunted, emaciated epigones were mockingly sent to Hades to feed on the crumbs of the former masters. As Aristophanes puts it, one felt a yearning for the last of the great dead, as intense as a sudden, powerful craving for sauerkraut. But when a truly new art form blossomed, one that venerated its predecessor and master in tragedy, it was horrifying to realize that it did indeed bear the traits of its mother, but the very same traits that the latter had displayed in her long death throes. This death throes of tragedy is called Euripides; the later art form is known as the modern Attic comedy. In it, the degenerate form of tragedy lived on, as a monument to its exceedingly arduous and painful demise.

The extraordinary veneration Euripides enjoyed among the poets of the later Attic comedy is well known. One of the most renowned, Philemon, declared that he would have himself hanged immediately to see Euripides in the underworld, if only he were convinced that the deceased still possessed life and reason. But what Euripides shared with Menander and Philemon, and what served as such a model for them, can be most succinctly summarized by the formula that they brought the spectator onto the stage. Before Euripides, these were heroically stylized figures whose descent from the gods and demigods of the earliest tragedies was immediately apparent. The spectator saw in them an idealized past of Hellenism and thus the reality of all that, in moments of rapture, also lived within his own soul. With Euripides, the spectator entered the stage, the human being into the reality of everyday life. The mirror, which had previously reflected only the grand and bold features, became more faithful and thus more base. The magnificent robe became, in a sense, more transparent, the mask a half-mask: the forms of everyday life emerged clearly. That truly typical image of the Greek, the figure of Odysseus, had been elevated by Aeschylus to the magnificent, cunningly noble character of Prometheus: in the hands of more recent poets, it degenerated into the role of the good-natured, sly house slave, as so often stands as the daring intriguer at the center of the entire drama. What Euripides claims as his own achievement in Aristophanic

"The Frogs"—that he had thinned out tragic art through a water cure and lessened its weight—applies above all to the heroic figures: essentially, the spectator saw and heard his own double on the Euripidean stage, albeit clothed in the magnificent garb of rhetoric. Ideality has retreated into the word and fled from thought. But it is precisely here that we touch upon the brilliant and striking aspect of Euripidean innovation: the people learned to speak through him; he himself boasts this in his contest with Aeschylus: through him they now understand

to work according to the rules of art,
to circle line by line,
notice, think, see, understand, listen,
love, sneak
to suspect, to deny, to consider back and forth.

He freed the tongue of modern comedy, whereas until Euripides, it was unclear how to properly portray everyday life on stage. The bourgeois middle class, on whom Euripides placed all his political hopes, now had its say, whereas previously, in tragedy, the demigod, and in old comedy, the drunken satyr or the demigod had served as language teachers.

"I depict house and home, where we live and weave"
And thus I exposed myself to judgment, since everyone who knew it,
"Judgments about my art."

Yes, that's what he boasts about,

"I alone have those rings
such wisdom is instilled by thought and concept
I lent art: so that here
Now everyone is philosophizing, and so are their house, farm, field, and livestock.
Ordered as cleverly as never before:
always researches and ponders
Why? What for? Who? Where? How? What?
Where did this go, who took this from me?

It was from such a prepared and enlightened mass that the new comedy was born, that dramatic chess game with its bright delight in mischievous pranks. For this new comedy, Euripides became, in a sense, the choirmaster: only this time the chorus of *listeners* had to be rehearsed. As soon as they could sing Euripideanly, the drama of the indebted young gentlemen, the frivolous-good-natured old people, the Kotzebuean courtesans, the Promethean house slaves began. But Euripides as

choirmaster was praised incessantly; indeed, one would have killed oneself to learn even more from him, had one not known that the tragic poets were as dead as tragedy itself. With it, however, the Greek had abandoned belief in his own immortality, not only belief in an ideal past, but also belief in an ideal future. The words from the well-known epitaph, "frivolous and eccentric in old age," also apply to aging Hellenism. The moment and wit are his highest deities; the fifth estate, that of the slave, now comes to power, at least in spirit.

In such a retrospective view, one is easily tempted to level unjust but heated accusations against Euripides as an alleged demagogue, and perhaps to conclude with the Aeschylean words: "What evil does *not* stem from him?" But whatever malevolent influences one attributes to him, it must always be emphasized that Euripides acted with the best of intentions and sacrificed his entire life magnificently to an ideal. In the way he fought against an immense evil he believed he had identified, how he, as an individual, confronted it with the force of his talent and his life, the heroic spirit of the old Marathonian era is revealed once more. Indeed, one can say that in Euripides the poet became a demigod, having been banished from tragedy by him. That immense evil he believed he had identified, against which he fought so heroically, was the decline of musical drama. But where did Euripides discover the decline of musical drama? In the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, his older contemporaries. This is very surprising. Could he not have been mistaken? Could he not have been unfair to Aeschylus and Sophocles? Was not his very reaction to the supposed decline perhaps the beginning of the end? All these questions are immediately being raised.

Euripides was a solitary thinker, not at all to the liking of the prevailing masses, among whom he aroused suspicion as a grumpy eccentric. Fortune was as unkind to him as it was to the masses: and since for a tragedian of that era, the masses were precisely what brought success, one understands why he achieved so little in his lifetime, only the honor of a single tragic victory. What drove this gifted poet so far against the general current? What led him astray from a path trodden by men like Aeschylus and Sophocles, and over which the sun of popular favor shone? A single thing: his belief in the decline of musical drama. This belief, however, he had gained in the theater's audience. For a long time, he had keenly observed the chasm that opened up between a tragedy and the Athenian public. What had been the highest and most difficult thing for the poet was not perceived as such by the spectator, but rather as something indifferent. Some accidental elements, not even emphasized by the poet, struck the masses with sudden force. Reflecting on this incongruity between poetic intention and effect, he gradually arrived at an art form whose main principle was "everything must be comprehensible in order for everything to be understood." Now every single element was brought before the

tribunal of this rationalistic aesthetic: myth first, then the main characters, the dramatic structure, the choral music, and finally, and most decisively, language. What we so often perceive in Euripides, in comparison to Sophoclean tragedy, as a poetic deficiency and a step backward, is the result of that energetic critical process, that audacious attempt at comprehensibility. One could say that this is an example of how the reviewer can become a poet. However, when using the word "reviewer," one must not be influenced by the impression of those feeble, presumptuous individuals who no longer allow our contemporary audience to have a voice in matters of art. Euripides sought to do better than the poets he judged: and anyone who, unlike him, cannot put action behind word has little right to publicly voice criticism. I can only offer one example of that productive criticism here, although it would actually be necessary to demonstrate that perspective in all the differences of Euripidean drama. Nothing could be more contrary to our stagecraft than the *Prologue* in Euripides. That a single person, deity or hero, at the beginning of the play explains who they are, what precedes the action, what has happened so far, and indeed what will happen in the course of the play—a modern playwright would consider this a deliberate renunciation of the effect of suspense. After all, we know everything that has happened and everything that will happen; who would want to wait for the end? Euripides reflected on this quite differently. The effect of ancient tragedy never rested on suspense, on the enticing uncertainty of what would happen next, but rather on those grand, expansive scenes of pathos in which the fundamental musical character of the Dionysian dithyramb resonated. But what most hinders the enjoyment of such scenes is a missing link, a gap in the fabric of the backstory; As long as the listener still has to work out the meaning of this or that person, this or that action, their full immersion in the suffering and actions of the main characters, tragic empathy, is impossible. In Aeschylean-Sophoclean tragedy, it was usually very artfully arranged that in the first scenes, the spectator was, as it were, given all those threads necessary for understanding, almost by chance; in this way, too, that noble artistry was revealed which, as it were, masks the necessary, the formal. Nevertheless, Euripides believed he observed that during those first scenes, the spectator had a peculiar restlessness, trying to work out the mathematical equation of the backstory, and that the poetic beauties of the exposition were lost to them. Therefore, he wrote a prologue as a program and had it declaimed by a reliable person, a deity. Now he could also shape the myth more freely, because through the prologue he could dispel any doubt about *his* ability to elevate the myth. Fully aware of this dramatic advantage, Euripides, in Aristophanes' ⋆The Frogs⋆, accuses Aeschylus of:

"So I'll go straight to your prologues."
in order to thus complete the first part of the tragedy

First, criticize him, this great mind!
He is confused when he discusses the facts of the case.

But what is true of the prologue is also true of the much-infamous deus ex machina: it outlines the program of the future, just as the prologue outlines that of the past. Between this epic preview and outward gaze lies the dramatic-lyrical reality and present.

Euripides is the first dramatist to follow a conscious aesthetic. He deliberately seeks the most comprehensible: his heroes *are* as real as they speak. But they also express themselves completely, whereas the Aeschylean and Sophoclean characters are much deeper and fuller than their words: they essentially only stammer about themselves. Euripides creates his characters by simultaneously dissecting them: before his anatomy, there is nothing hidden in them anymore. If Sophocles said of Aeschylus that he did the right thing, but unconsciously, then Euripides would have thought that he did the wrong thing, *because* he did it unconsciously. What Sophocles *knew* more about than Aeschylus , and what he took pride in, was nothing that lay outside the realm of *technical* skill; no poet of antiquity until Euripides had been able to truly justify his best work with aesthetic arguments. For that is precisely the marvelous aspect of the entire development of Greek art: that the concept, the consciousness, the theory had not yet found expression, and that everything the disciple could learn from the master was related to technique. And so it is also what, for example, gives Thorvaldsen that ancient appearance: that he reflected little, spoke and wrote poorly, that true artistic wisdom had not yet entered his consciousness.

Euripides, however, possesses a fractured aura peculiar to modern artists: his almost un-Greek artistic character can be most succinctly captured by the concept of *Socraticism* . "Everything must be conscious in order to be beautiful" is the Euripidean parallel to the Socratic "everything must be conscious in order to be good." Euripides is the poet of Socratic rationalism.

In ancient Greece, there was a sense of connection between the names of Socrates and Euripides. The opinion that Socrates assisted Euripides in his writing was widespread in Athens, demonstrating how discerningly Socratic elements were perceived in Euripidean tragedy. Those who clung to the ideals of the "good old days" often lumped together the names of Socrates and Euripides, as corrupters of the people. It is also recorded that Socrates avoided attending tragedies and only appeared among the spectators when a new play by Euripides was being performed. In a deeper sense, the two names appear in close proximity in the famous Delphic oracle, which so profoundly influenced Socrates' entire worldview. The word of

the Delphic god, that Socrates was the wisest among men, simultaneously implied that Euripides deserved second prize in the contest of wisdom.

It is well known how initially suspicious Socrates was of the god's pronouncement. To see if the god was right, he went among statesmen, orators, poets, and artists, seeking to find someone wiser than himself. Everywhere he found the god's word justified: he saw the most famous men of his time caught up in a delusion about themselves and found that they lacked even a proper understanding of their work, acting solely on instinct. "Only on instinct"—that is the catchphrase of Socraticism. Never has rationalism appeared more naive than in that life tendency of Socrates. Never did he doubt the validity of the entire question. "Wisdom consists in knowledge," and "one knows nothing that one cannot express and convince others of." This is roughly the principle behind Socrates' strange missionary activity, which inevitably gathered a cloud of the darkest resentment around him, precisely because no one was able to attack the principle itself against Socrates: for that would have required something they utterly lacked, that Socratic superiority in the art of discourse, in dialectic. From the perspective of the infinitely profound Germanic consciousness, that Socraticism appears as a completely distorted world; but it is reasonable to assume that even to the poets and artists of that time, Socrates must have seemed at least very tedious and ridiculous, especially when, in his unproductive eristic discourse, he still invoked the seriousness and dignity of a divine calling. The fanatics of logic are as unbearable as wasps. And now imagine an immense will behind such a one-sided intellect, the most primal, personal force of an unbroken character, coupled with a fantastically attractive outward ugliness: and one will understand how even such a great talent as Euripides, precisely because of the seriousness and depth of his thinking, could all the more inevitably be led down the slippery slope of *conscious* artistic creation had to be torn apart. The decline of tragedy, as Euripides believed he saw it, was a Socratic phantasmagoria: because no one could adequately translate the wisdom of the ancient art technique into concepts and words, Socrates, and with him the seduced Euripides, denied that wisdom. Euripides then contrasted that unproven "wisdom" with the Socratic artwork, albeit still under the guise of numerous accommodations to the prevailing artwork. A later generation correctly recognized what was shell and what was essence: they cast off the former, and the fruit of artistic Socraticism revealed itself as the theatrical game of chess, the piece of intrigue.

Socraticism despises instinct and, consequently, art. It denies wisdom precisely where its true domain lies. In one instance, Socrates himself acknowledged the power of instinctual wisdom, and in a highly characteristic way. In particular situations where his reason became uncertain, Socrates found firm support through a wondrously expressive, demonic voice. This voice , *when it comes, always warns*

. In this quite abnormal individual, unconscious wisdom raises its voice to *obstruct* the conscious mind here and there. Here, too, it is revealed how Socrates truly belongs to a distorted and upside-down world. In all productive natures, the unconscious acts creatively and affirmatively, while consciousness behaves critically and admonishly. In him, instinct becomes the critic, consciousness the creator.

Socratic disregard for the instinctual also prompted a second genius, besides Euripides, to reform art, and indeed to reform it even more radically. Even the divine Plato fell victim to Socraticism in this respect: he, who saw in previous art only the imitation of illusions, also counted "the sublime and highly praised" tragedy—as he put it—among the flattering arts, which tend to depict only what is agreeable, what flatters the sensual nature, not what is unpleasant but simultaneously useful. He thus quite diligently places tragic art alongside the art of dressing up and the art of cooking. Such a diverse and colorful art, he argued, was contrary to the prudent disposition of the mind, and dangerous tinder for the irritable and sensitive: reason enough to banish the tragic poets from the ideal state. In his view, artists belong to the superfluous extensions of the state, along with wet nurses, milliners, barbers, and bakers. Plato's deliberately harsh and ruthless condemnation of art has something pathological about it: he, who only rose to that view in a rage against his own flesh, he, who trampled his profoundly artistic nature underfoot in favor of Socraticism, reveals in the harshness of those judgments that the deepest wound of his being has not yet healed. Plato treats the poet's true creative power, because it is not conscious insight into the essence of things, almost exclusively with irony and considers it on par with the talent of soothsayers and interpreters of signs. The poet, he argues, is only capable of writing poetry once he has become inspired and unconscious, and no reason dwells within him. To these "uncomprehending" artists, Plato contrasts the image of the true artist, the philosophical one, and makes it quite clear that he himself is the only one who has attained this ideal, and whose dialogues may be read in the perfect state. The essence of the Platonic artwork, the dialogue, is the formlessness and lack of style produced by the mixture of all existing forms and styles. Above all, the new artwork should not be flawed by what, according to Plato's understanding, was the fundamental defect of the old: it should not be an imitation of a semblance of reality; that is, in the common sense, there should be nothing natural that has been imitated in the Platonic dialogue. Thus, it hovers between all genres of art, between prose and poetry, narrative, lyric, and drama, just as it has broken the strict, older law of a unified—stylistic—linguistic form. Socraticism is distorted even further by cynical writers: they seek to reflect, in the greatest variability of style, in the oscillation between prosaic and metrical forms, the silenic external nature of Socrates, his crab eyes, thick lips and pendulous belly.

In view of the very profound, and here only touched upon, unartistic effects of Socraticism, who would not agree with Aristophanes when he has the chorus sing:

"Blessed is he who *did not* follow Socrates"
may sit and talk,
not condemning the art of the muses
and the highest of the tragedy
not overlooked with contempt!
It is nothing but vain folly,
on pompous, empty speeches
and abstract speculating
to turn idle effort into something!

But the most damning thing that could be said against Socrates was revealed to him in a dream. As he recounted to his friends in prison, Socrates was frequently plagued by the same dream, which always said the same thing: "Socrates, make music!" However, Socrates remained steadfast until his dying days in the belief that his philosophy was the highest form of music. Finally, in prison, to completely ease his conscience, he even resorted to making that "common" music. He did indeed put some prosaic fables he knew into verse, but I do not believe that these metrical exercises appeased the Muses.

was *In Socrates, that one* aspect of Hellenism, that *Apollonian clarity* , without any foreign admixture, *embodied; he appeared like a pure, transparent ray of light, as a harbinger and herald of the science* that was also to be born in Greece. But science and art are mutually exclusive: from this perspective, it is significant that Socrates was the first great Hellene who was ugly; indeed, everything about him is symbolic. He is the father of logic, which most sharply represents the character of pure science; he is the destroyer of musical drama, which had gathered within itself the rays of all ancient art.

The latter is true in a far deeper sense than has been suggested so far. Socraticism is older than Socrates; its art-dissolving influence became noticeable much earlier. The element of dialectic, peculiar to it, had already crept into musical drama long before Socrates and wreaked havoc on the beautiful body of work. The corruption originated in dialogue. Dialogue, as is well known, is not original to tragedy; it only developed relatively late once there were two actors. An analogue existed before this in the exchange between the hero and the chorus leader: but here, dialectical *conflict* was impossible due to the subordination of one to the other. However, as soon as two equal protagonists faced each other, competition arose, in accordance with a deeply Hellenic impulse—competition with words and arguments: while the

amorous dialogue always remained foreign to Greek tragedy. That contest appealed to an element in the listener's heart that, until then, had been banished from the festive halls of the dramatic arts as hostile to art and hated by the muses: the "evil" Eris. The good Eris, of course, had always presided over all artistic endeavors and, in tragedy, brought three competing poets before the assembled people for judgment. But when the image of verbal strife from the courtroom also intruded upon tragedy, a dualism arose for the first time in the nature and effect of the musical drama. From then on, there were parts of the tragedy in which compassion receded in favor of the bright delight in the clashing battle of dialectics. The hero of the drama could not be defeated; he now also had to participate in the *Words* are made into heroes. The process, which began in the so-called stichomythia, continued and penetrated even the longer speeches of the main characters. Gradually, all the characters speak with such an effort at acumen, clarity, and transparency that a truly bewildering overall impression arises for us when reading a Sophoclean tragedy. It seems to us as if all these characters perished not from the tragic, but from a superfetation of the logical. One need only compare how completely different Shakespeare's heroes are. [a] The dialectic: a certain musical beauty and internalization pervades all their thinking, surmising, and deduction, whereas in later Greek tragedy a highly problematic dualism of style prevails—here the power of music, there that of dialectic. The latter increasingly dominates until it has the decisive say in the structure of the entire drama. The trial ends with the intrigue: only then is that dualism completely overcome, as a result of the total annihilation of one of the competitors, music.

It is highly significant that this process *in comedy* concludes , *whereas it began in tragedy. Tragedy, born from the deep wellspring of compassion, is inherently pessimistic* . Existence is something truly terrible within it, and humankind something utterly foolish. The hero of tragedy does not, as modern aesthetics imagines, struggle against fate, nor does he suffer what he deserves. Rather, blind and with his head veiled, he plunges into his doom: and his desolate yet noble gesture, with which he stands before this newly recognized world of horror, pierces our soul like a thorn. Dialectic, on the other hand, is fundamentally *optimistic* : it believes in cause and effect, and thus in a necessary relationship between guilt and punishment, virtue and happiness: its calculations must work out perfectly; it denies everything it cannot conceptually dissect. Dialectic continually achieves its goal; every conclusion is its celebration, brightness and awareness the air in which alone it can breathe. When this element penetrates tragedy, a dualism arises, like that between night and day, music and mathematics. The hero, who must defend his actions with reason and counter-reason, is in danger of losing our sympathy: for the misfortune that nevertheless befalls him afterward only proves that he miscalculated somewhere. Misfortune, however, brought about by miscalculations, is already

more of a comedic motif. When the delight in dialectic had corroded tragedy, the modern comedy arose with its perpetual triumph of cunning and guile.

The Socratic consciousness and its optimistic belief in the necessary union of virtue and knowledge, of happiness and virtue, has had the effect in a large number of Euripides' plays of ending with the prospect of a very comfortable future, usually involving marriage. As soon as the god appears on the machine, we realize that Socrates is behind the mask, attempting to balance happiness and virtue on his scales. Everyone knows the Socratic propositions: "Virtue is knowledge; sin only arises from ignorance. The virtuous person is the happy person." In these three fundamental forms of optimism lies the death of pessimistic tragedy. Long before Euripides, these views were already working toward the resolution of tragedy. If virtue is knowledge, then the virtuous hero must be a dialectician. Given the extraordinary shallowness and poverty of ethical, utterly undeveloped thought, the ethically dialectical hero all too often appears as the herald of moral triviality and philistinism. One need only have the courage to admit this; one must confess—not to mention Euripides—that even the most beautiful figures of Sophoclean tragedy, an Antigone, an Electra, an Oedipus, sometimes lapse into utterly intolerably trivial trains of thought, that, without exception, the dramatic characters are more beautiful and magnificent than their verbal expression. From this standpoint, our judgment of the older Aeschylean tragedy must be considerably more favorable: for it, Aeschylus also unconsciously created his best work. Indeed, in Shakespeare's language and characterization, we have an unshakeable foundation for such comparisons. In him, one finds an ethical wisdom that makes Socraticism seem somewhat presumptuous and pedantic by comparison.

In my last lecture, I deliberately said very little about the limitations of music in Greek musical drama. In the context of these discussions, it will be understandable if I described the limitations of music in musical drama as the dangerous points at which its process of disintegration began. Tragedy perished due to an optimistic dialectic and ethics: this means exactly the same as saying that musical drama perished due to a lack of music. The intrusion of Socratic elements into tragedy prevented music from merging with dialogue and monologue, even though it had made the most successful start in this direction in Aeschylean tragedy. A further consequence was that music, increasingly restricted and driven into ever narrower confines, no longer felt at home in tragedy, but developed more freely and boldly outside of it as an absolute art. It is ridiculous to have a ghost appear at a midday meal: it is ridiculous to demand of such a mysterious, earnestly passionate muse as the muse of tragic music that she should sing in the courtroom, during the interludes of dialectical battles. Feeling this absurdity, music fell silent in tragedy, as if terrified by its unheard-of desecration; less and less often did it dare to raise its

voice, finally it became confused, it sang things that did not belong, it was ashamed and fled entirely from the theater. To speak quite frankly, the flowering and culmination of Greek musical drama is Aeschylus in his first great period, before he was influenced by Sophocles: with Sophocles begins the gradual decline, until finally Euripides, with his deliberate reaction against Aeschylean tragedy, brings about its swift end.

This judgment contradicts only a currently prevalent aesthetic: in truth, no lesser testimony can be cited for it than that of Aristophanes, who, like no other genius, is electively related to Aeschylus. But like is recognized only by like.

Finally, a single question. Is musical drama truly dead, dead for all time? Should the Germanic people really be allowed to offer nothing but "grand opera" as a counterpart to that vanished work of art from the past, much like the ape appears next to Hercules? This is the most serious question facing our art: and who among the Germanic people truly grasps the gravity of this question?